

# Portugal and the Holocaust

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Portugal, a neutral country during World War II, was one of the few European ports of refuge for a large number of refugees who were running from the war and Hitler's persecution. Ironically, it was in a nationalist dictatorship, with ties to the anti-communism and anti-liberalism of the German national socialist regime, where many of those persecuted by the Nazis, with different customs, social behaviours, cultural opinions and diverse politics, were able to relate with the Portuguese.

The absence of anti-Semitism within the Salazar ideology, the fact that the Portuguese dictatorial regime – despite similarities with the Nazi regime – differentiated itself in basic aspects from the German one, as well as the geo-political circumstances of the Portuguese neutrality, in the end made it possible for many of those persecuted by National Socialism to find salvation in Portugal. Their entry into the country, however, was hindered, particularly, by the secret police force PVDE (*Polícia de Vigilância e de Defesa do Estado*, the "State Defence and Surveillance Police"), their presence merely tolerated as a temporary in-transit stay while their definitive exile was impeded.

## The tightening of the Portuguese border policy

As in other countries, the Portuguese border policy later become more restrictive with the growth in the influx of people needing to save their lives in Portugal. Starting in 1938, with the introduction of the anti-Semitic legislation in Germany, which barred Jews from exercising certain professions, their expulsion from economic life and the *Kristallnacht* ("night of crystal") prompted many German Jews to leave their country. Joining these German Jews and anti-Nazis, who then started seek out other European countries, were the Jews from Austria, Czechoslovakia and Italy, when the anti-Semitic legislation spread to those countries after the *Anschluss* ("annexation" of Austria) and the invasion of the Sudeten.

After the Evian Conference – in which Portugal did not participate – convened by Roosevelt in June of that year to "resolve" the problem of emigrants "flooding" some of the European countries, limits on entries and stays of German, Austrian, Italian and Polish Jews were introduced into the laws. A case in point: on 12 September, Switzerland and Sweden established a provision prevent the entry of and deport foreigners without visas who could not return to "their countries for political reasons or due to race laws"<sup>1</sup>. Inspired by that law, on 28 October 1938, the Minister of Foreign Affairs – Salazar himself -sent circular no. 10 to various consulates in Europe, stating that "Jewish emigrants" would now need 30-day "tourism" visas to be able to enter Portugal.

As a result, that order covered for the first time a large specific group of candidates wanting to enter the country that had become identifiable from the moment Germany placed the letter "J" on Jewish passports, thus specifying those who were unwelcome to return to Germany: precisely the Jews, those "emigrants" who were banned from returning to their country of origin. The main defender of those restrictive entry measures into Portugal was the inspector of the PVDE (*Polícia de Vigilância e Defesa do Estado*), an internal and international political police force, Paulo Cumano, a

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<sup>1</sup> Diplomatic Historical Archive of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (DHAMFA), 2nd floor, A43, M48.

Germanophile who proposed that the entry into Portugal of German, Italian, Hungarian and Polish Jews pass through the sieve of prior authorisation from this police force.

However, this idea was not unique to Paulo Cumano, being also shared by the Director of the PVDE, Agostinho Lourenço, who believed that Jews were “international adventurers” or “spies serving Germany”. On 24 October 1939, he sent a confidential letter to the Portuguese Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA), requesting their cooperation in tightening the restrictive policy on visas<sup>2</sup>. The MFA agreed with the proposal of the PVDE and sent circular no. 14 to its diplomatic departments in November 1939, which assigned career diplomats with the exclusive right to grant visas. However, they had to consult with the PVDE and the Ministry before putting visas in passports of stateless persons, of Jews expelled from their countries of nationality and of persons without consular visa for their countries of destination and without a guarantee of boarding a ship or plane.

On 15 June 1940, the day after the German occupation of Paris, diplomats received a new directive (no. 23) stating that, from that moment, 30-day transit visas could only be issued to refugees with tickets for travel and entry visas in a destination country. A telegraph order on 16 de December 1940 once again worsened the situation by making the issuance of all transit visas dependent on the authorisation of the PVDE<sup>3</sup>, a hard line probably taken as a result of the actions of Aristides Sousa Mendes in June of that year

Some Portuguese diplomats in occupied and Axis countries, directly in contact with the miseries and persecutions suffered by Jews and all those persecuted by National Socialism, interceded on their behalf, disobeying at times the orders of the MFA and the PVDE and being subsequently dismissed. However, the most well-known case was that of Aristides de Sousa Mendes<sup>4</sup>, Portuguese Consul in Bordeaux, the city where, beginning in April 1940, thousands of Danish, Norwegian, Dutch, Belgian and Luxembourgian refugees arrived, fleeing from the war after the German invasion of their countries.

Aristides de Sousa Mendes then decided that he would give visas to all who requested, without discriminating based on religion, politics or race. He considered it immoral and unconstitutional to ask visa applicants if they were Jews and, in addition, argued that the time had come for the Portuguese to redeem themselves for expelling Jews in 1497. So, on the three days between 17 and 19 June, he freely granted thousands of visas, ordered the Consuls of Toulouse and Bayonne to do the same and urged the Portuguese Ambassador in Brussels to do so also.

Salazar then sent the ambassador in Madrid, Pedro Teotónio Pereira, to resolve the situation on the French-Spanish border of Irun, where the Spanish authorities threatened to refuse to recognise the Portuguese visas and warned them to not complain later if “the Germans went to Portugal after the refugees”<sup>5</sup>. On the 24th of June, the same day that the Portuguese border and Bayonne consulate were closed, Spain stopped recognising Portuguese visas. Between that day and the 8th of July, Aristides Sousa Mendes was in Hendaye where he was seen signing visas at the train station. As is widely known, Aristides Sousa Mendes paid dearly for his disobedience to the Portuguese dictator and was later discharged for his “professional inability to manage consulates”.

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<sup>2</sup> DHAMFA, 2nd floor, A43, M38B. Confidential Letter of the PVDE on 24 October 1939.

<sup>3</sup> DHAMFA, 2nd floor, A43, M38B.

<sup>4</sup> Rui Afonso, *Um Homem Bom. Aristides de Sousa Mendes, o “Wallenberg Português”* (Lisbon: Caminho, 1995), 118-120.

<sup>5</sup> Pedro Teotónio Pereira, *Memórias*, vol. II (Lisboa: Verbo, 1973), 219-220

### **Refugees in Portugal.**

Thanks to the former Consul in Bordeaux, an enormous influx of refugees arrived in Portugal, a country facing the Atlantic that had become the only neutral port with maritime connections to the *Ultramar* (as the Portuguese colonies in Africa were called). Remember, though, that before getting tickets for travel on a ship or flight, the main concern of the refugees was to arrange for a Portuguese transit visa which could mean life instead of a death foretold. Before arriving in Portugal, those fleeing the war and Nazism needed an exit visa from Germany or the occupied countries, an entry visa in the French “free zone”, a Spanish transit visa and then one from Portugal, which depended on the previous one having been granted. The latter, in turn, was only given once an entry visa for a destination country and passage on a ship had been obtained.

In addition to the obstacles to entering Portugal, refugees found themselves up against numerous difficulties, namely those as a result of lack of transportation means, which made staying in Portugal impossible or very stressful. When, for example, refugees stopped being able to count on Greek, Italian and North-American ships in 1941 – after the USA entered the war – the wait times for means of transportation could turn foreigners initially armed with all the visas into illegal immigrants.

Others were stopped from entering the country across land borders. In the summer of 1940, when the borders were briefly closed, many refugees had to stay in Vilar Formoso, even though they ended up continuing on their way once the Spanish authorities refused to take them back. For those who had entered the country without a visa or when its validity expired, the great fear was, however, to be caught in a PVDE police raid. In fact, let it be said that this Portuguese police force specifically persecuted foreigners it did not trust politically or who were suspected of being communists.

### **News of the Holocaust reaches Portugal**

Starting in 1943, when the war seemed to be turning in favour of the Allies, things became easier for the few refugees still in Portugal without a destination country visa, because not only aid organisations but also the British and North American governments started obtaining facilities for them. Let it be said, though, that from that point on it was rare that refugees still made it to Portugal, many times illegally, since the Nazi policy of the so called “final solution of the Jewish problem” had already begun – the mass killing of Jews, Gypsies, Russians and other victims of Nazism in the extermination camps.

News of what would later be called the Holocaust (or Shoah) arrived to the Portuguese government in an unfocused manner, as it did everywhere, but it would become clearer with time. The Portuguese government would receive information from its various diplomatic representations on the treatment Germans reserved for the Jews in occupied and satellite territories, starting with occupied France and Vichy France. Among the almost 200,000 Jews who lived in the metropolitan area of Paris in 1939, there were around 30,000 Sephardic Jews from Levante, close to half of whom had French citizenship and the remaining 15,000 were of various nationalities, specifically Greek and Turkish. Some – few – had Portuguese nationality.

In September of 1941, the detaining of 2,894 adult Jews, French and foreign, began in the occupied French capital, some of whom were Sephardic Jews whose ancestors had been banished from the Iberian Peninsula in the 16<sup>th</sup> century and who continued to desperately plead with the Portuguese Legation in Vichy to renew their consular registration. Soon after that, the Minister Plenipotenciary of Portugal in Vichy, José Caeiro da Mata, would communicate to the MFA that the French government

would “promote anti-Semitic law, prohibiting State services such as the press, advertising and radio broadcasting to Israelis”<sup>6</sup> in French Morocco, as well.

The MFA also received information on Romania from the Portuguese diplomatic corps in Bucharest, giving an account of the persecutions carried out against the Jews by Marechal Antonescu and with the approval of the majority of Romanians<sup>7</sup>. The Portuguese government also obtained extremely important information, in a direct manner, about the *Einsatzgruppen* in the invaded Soviet Union, through members of Portuguese military missions sent to Germany in December 1941, where they became aware of the violence against the Jews in the Baltic countries.

As for Poland, in a Memorandum of 7 November 1940, from the Vatican<sup>8</sup>, there was already mention of “one of the big work camps”, located near “Oswiecim”, better known as Auschwitz, where more than 8000 prisoners were being used as “manual labour”, malnourished and tortured, “some dying as a consequence of the torture inflicted upon them”. On 22 May 1942, a document from the head of Foreign Affairs for the Polish Government in exile in London arrived at the Portuguese MFA, where it also mentioned the names of the concentration camps of Oswiecim, Oranienburg, Mauthausen and Dachau, which would become part “of the annals of German bestiality”. No mention was made to the Jews and to extermination camps.

Once again, on 18 June, the Legation of the Polish government in exile in Lisbon would deliver to the MFA the speech by the President of the Polish Council, given on 9 June in London, in which he specifically mentioned the Jews, among whom he noted there were “hundreds of thousands of innocent victims”. He said that they had been subject to mass slaughter, mentioning death by starvation in the ghettos and the fact that Germany was “exterminating all the Jews without concern for the war’s outcome”<sup>9</sup>.

In addition, the Portuguese government also received the statement of 17 December 1942, issued by Great Britain, United States, Soviet Union, Free France and the Polish government in exile in London<sup>10</sup>. After this Allied declaration regarding the crimes which the Germans were perpetrating in Poland and in the USSR and reaffirming “its protests and indignation against these new acts committed by the Reich in violation of the basic elements of law and morality common to mankind”<sup>11</sup>, it was impossible for the Salazar regime to ignore the genocide reporting on the extermination of Jews in Poland

On 15 January 1943, the Polish government in exile sent the Portuguese MFA a document published on 10 December, which specifically mentioned the extermination of Jews in territories occupied by the Germans<sup>12</sup>. On 25 January, the Polish government mentioned the massacres carried out “methodically by Germans against the Jewish population of Poland” and the “thousands of Jews that the German authorities deported from western countries and from Central Europe to Poland”. The same document

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<sup>6</sup> DHAMFA, 2<sup>nd</sup> floor A47 M 105 Legation in Vichy, fls. 9 and following

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 3<sup>rd</sup> floor., A. 8, M.6.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., GSG 13, folder 23

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 2<sup>nd</sup> floor., A.49, M. 96

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 2<sup>nd</sup> floor., A.49, M. 96

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 2<sup>nd</sup> floor., A.49, M. 96

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 2<sup>nd</sup> floor., A.49, M. 96

informed that the Germans had established 80 concentration camps in Germany and 24 in Poland, among which were those of Treblinka and Auschwitz, located around 40km from Krakow. The document stated that in June 1942, there were 8,620 women and 54,720 men detained there, 8,170 of whom were Jews. In addition, there were also around 22,500 who had gone through the camp without being registered and it was thought that around 58,000 people had already died. However, according to what we believe, the Polish document was not referring to the Auschwitz-Birkenau extermination camp, but the Auschwitz I concentration camp.

Later, several crimes of the Germans in Poland were listed and, specifically, “alarming” information about the situation in the province of Lublin, where the “procedure” adopted by the Nazis meant separating the adults from the youth, with the healthy ones sent to labour camps and the others to concentration camps. It was known that one of those contingents had been taken to the “death camp” of Oswiecim, where families were separated and children under 6 were taken to the Reich to be educated with Germans, with mothers who refused to leave their children being killed on the spot. In an attachment, it was stated that the “elderly, invalids, cripples and physically disabled” had been deported to unknown locations, which meant “their destruction in special death camps”.

On 24 April 1943, two new Polish communiqués came into the hands of the Portuguese government. One of them, of the 19<sup>th</sup>, from the Polish ministry of National Defence, gave an account of the massacre of more than one and a half million Poles in concentration camps, as well as the transportation of 80,000 Poles of military age, officials and civilians, to the extermination camps of Majdanek and Treblinka<sup>13</sup>.

### **The German ultimatum and Portuguese Jews in Holland**

At that time, it was already relatively clear that the Germans were facing serious military difficulties. On 2 February 1943, they surrendered in Stalingrad and, on 13 May, in Tunisia, and following these defeat came the landing of the Allies in Sicily, on 10 July. However, the failures in the war did not prevent the radicalisation of the anti-Semitic policy of extermination; quite the contrary. It was then that the Eastern ghettos were closed and their inhabitants deported to extermination camps. They would soon be joined there by Danish, Yugoslavian and Greek Jews.

It was within this context that, on 4 February 1943, the German Legation in Lisbon would send an important letter to the Portuguese government. The letter warned that, “in the interest of [German] military safety, starting on 1 April of that year, all foreign Jews” in occupied territories – including those of Portuguese nationality – would be subject “to the dispositions in effect regarding Jews, including their distinct identification, detention and subsequent expulsion.” “As a courtesy” Salazar’s government was informed so that it could have “the opportunity to remove Jews of Portuguese nationality from the aforementioned territories under German rule.”

The MFA informed its minister in Berlin, Count Tovar de Lemos, of the contents of the German communication, but on 1 March 1943, he continued to request

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 3<sup>rd</sup> floor A69 M163a and b, 3<sup>rd</sup> floor A 48 M 22-23

an urgent response from the Portuguese government on this matter<sup>14</sup>. The response of the Portuguese MFA to its Legation in Berlin came only one week later, in a telegram stating that the situation was being “carefully studied because it involved delicate issues”, due to the “corrupt or false origins of Portuguese nationality which almost all Jews say or think they have.”

On 16 March 1943, a new order was sent by Salazar to the Portuguese Legation in Berlin, informing that he had received a visit from a “Portuguese Israeli of high standing,” presenting him with “requests from Dutch Jews who say they are of Portuguese descent so that we can intervene with that Government to allow them to leave the Netherlands.” Salazar added that this issue was different from the previous one – in other words, the Jews of Portuguese “nationality” – and that, to “set the criteria to be followed” it became “imperative to know first of all if the German government” would be “willing to authorise the departure of Dutch Israeli families for whom the Portuguese Government” could “eventually recognise the ancestry they claim”<sup>15</sup>.

Through an indirect testimony<sup>16</sup>, we know today that the “Portuguese Israeli of high standing” was the president of the Lisbon Israeli Community (LIC), Moisés Amzalak. He would later tell this witness that he had received an urgent telegram, from the Joint headquarters in New York, asking him to do all he could to save those whose names were on a list, and he said he had hurried to request an interview with Salazar. Called into the presence of Salazar, the Portuguese leader had told him, with “tears in his eyes”, the content of a conversation he had just had with the German minister in Lisbon, Hoyningen-Huene. He had promised Salazar that the Jews in question had nothing to fear, should they in fact be Portuguese citizens, since Portugal was a neutral country. However, if they were considered Dutch Jews, they would be seen as enemies<sup>17</sup>. We recall that the treatment reserved for the “Jews who were subjects of any enemy State”, according to a statement by the German minister for Foreign Affairs in mid-1943, was “confinement”.<sup>18</sup>

To understand the situation of Portuguese Jews in Holland, let us go back a bit in time, remembering that when Germany conquered and occupied the Netherlands in 1940, there were around 35,000 Sephardic Jews who lived in that country, many of them believed to be of Spanish origin and around 4,300 of Portuguese descent<sup>19</sup>. To escape the Nazis, hundreds of these tried to deny their ties to the Jewish people in the same way as the others and presented a series of historical and genealogical studies, requesting exemption from the application of the German anti-Semitic laws. The Nazi authorities analysed the situation at length until, in August 1942, the Commissioner of the Reich to the Dutch Occupied Territories, Callmeyer, stated that such “*Marranos*”

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid.. Telegrams received by the Portuguese Legation in Berlin; Public Record Office (PRO)-HW 12-296 21 March/43 115886.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid. Telegrams sent in 1943 by the MFA to the Portuguese Legation in Berlin

<sup>16</sup> Report by Dr. R. Migdal, Israeli Consul-general in Portugal, of October 1973, in Haim Avni, “L’Espagne, le Portugal et les Juifs sépharades au xx siècle. Propositions pour une étude comparée”, in *Mémoires Juives d’Espagne et du Portugal*, dir. Esther Benbassa (Paris. Publisud, 1996), 323 and following.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Bernd Rother, *Franco y Holocausto*, (Madrid: Marcial Pons, 2005), 119

<sup>19</sup> Haim Avni, “L’Espagne, le Portugal et les Juifs sépharades au xx siècle. Propositions pour une étude comparée”, 323

should be viewed “as Jews”. He left the door open for individual cases in where the “Arian-Portuguese” origin could be “presented credibly”<sup>20</sup>.

The truth is that around 29 September 1943, Amsterdam was already “free of Jews”, after around 35,000 had been deported to Sobibor, where the majority of them were assassinated, with only 19 of those Dutch Jews surviving<sup>21</sup>. On 1 October of that year, the German study commission, responsible for analysing the document of the 4,000 Jews in Holland requesting that they benefit from the exemption of the anti-Semitic discriminations by virtue of their being Portuguese, decided that only 10% of these were exempt, and later reduced that number to half. Many of the others were deported at the end of 1943. In a report from February 1944, the German authorities stated that in various raids, carried out from the first day of that month in Holland, the Germans arrested 308 Jews of Portuguese descent, deporting them on the 26<sup>th</sup>. Seven others would join them later.

Among those who were sent to the concentration camp of Theresienstadt, in occupied Czechoslovakia, there were only 23 who survived by claiming Portuguese nationality<sup>22</sup>. The last 400 Portuguese Jews, incarcerated in a Nazi camp in Holland, were sent to Auschwitz and immediately assassinated<sup>23</sup>. Among the 160,000 Jews who lived in Holland in 1940, only 20,000 survived, including 200 Portuguese Jews<sup>24</sup>. In the post-war period, the then new head of the Portuguese Legation in The Hague as from December 1945, António de Faria, calculated that of the 4,000 members of the Portuguese Israeli community in Holland, only 500 had been saved<sup>25</sup>.

### **Repatriation of Portuguese Jews from France and Belgium**

On 27 March 1943<sup>26</sup>, Salazar informed his diplomat in Berlin, Tovar de Lemos, that he had received from the Legation of Portugal in Vichy requests for repatriation presented to the Consul in Marseille by “Portuguese Jews”, involving thirty-one persons. Due to that number being small, Salazar said that he had not hesitated in “taking the political and humanitarian stance that seemed best”, authorising the “granting of passports to Portugal to those individuals” after learning that the French authorities would be willing to “favourably consider the return of Israelis to the country of origin”. The consul in Paris stated that he had in his area around thirty Portuguese Jewish families, totalling close to one hundred persons, while the diplomat in Brussels, communicated the names of “seven Portuguese Jews seeking repatriation”.

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<sup>20</sup> António Louçã, *Conspiradores e Traficantes. Portugal no Tráfico de Armas e Divisas nos Anos do Nazismo. 1933, 1945* (Lisbon: Oficina do Livro, 2005), 206-207.

<sup>21</sup> Saul Friedländer, *Nazi Germany and the Jews, 1939-1945. The Years of Extermination*, (London: Phoenix, 2008), 547-548

<sup>22</sup> Haim Avni, “L’Espagne, le Portugal et les Juifs sépharades au xx siècle. Propositions pour une étude comparée”, 212

<sup>23</sup> Saul Friedländer, *Nazi Germany and the Jews, 1939-1945. The Years of extermination*, 606-607

<sup>24</sup> António Melo, “Morreram porque acreditaram que eram portugueses”, in *Estrelas da Memória*, *Estrelas da Memória*, dir. Esther Mucznik (Lisbon: Edition Reborn, 2005), 192-193.

<sup>25</sup> Haim Avni, “L’Espagne, le Portugal et les Juifs sépharades au xx siècle. Propositions pour une étude comparée”, 212.

<sup>26</sup> Public Record Office (PRO)-HW 12-296 21 March/43 115886, 27/3/1943

Salazar authorised their travel to Portugal, but warned that the “high number of Jews indicated by the Paris Consul” required the examination of whether those “Jewish families are simply of ancestry or if they are registered at the consulate as nationals”. Regarding “the individuals who claim or simply allege having past Portuguese ancestry”, as was the case of the Dutch Jews, Salazar clarified that the issue needed to “be examined after an exchange of visits with the governments of the countries where the Jews are located and their requests suitably substantiated in terms of their numbers, standing and situation”<sup>27</sup>. He also affirmed that, “regarding Portuguese Jews in Germany with nationality recognised in Portuguese documents”, the Portuguese stance could be the same, should the number not be “so inflated” that it would lead one to “believe in abuse”<sup>28</sup>.

Furthermore, in regard to Jews of Portuguese descent living in occupied France and Belgium, the Portuguese government presented to the Germans, on 21 April, a list with 10 Belgians and, on 26 May, a second one with 99 Jews grouped into 56 families, sent by the Portuguese Consul in Paris. Upon being transmitted to Eichmann, the lists unleashed a controversy between Auswärtiges Amt – the German Ministry of Foreign Affairs – and Portuguese diplomatic officials over the assets that those Jews were authorised to take to Portugal, since Germany wanted them to leave without anything. In June 1943, the Portuguese minister in Berlin received a telegraph order from the Portuguese MFA to “secure authorisation so that the Jews in Paris could transfer capital with sufficient revenue to provide for their upkeep, or at least, they could receive that income from there”<sup>29</sup>.

In July, the minister of Portugal in Vichy, Caeiro da Mata, presented an authorisation request to the German Embassy in Vichy for the exit of 57 Portuguese citizens of Jewish heritage from France. On 2 July 1943, the consul in Marseille, Vieira Lisboa, sent the Legation in Vichy a list of 38 people who wished to leave for Portugal<sup>30</sup>. Let it be said, however, that the director of the PVDE commented that he did not contest ties to Portugal of those who had reliable certificates, but that, when it came to the others, it was necessary to carry out a thorough verification of their identity since<sup>31</sup>. The police thus proposed that only those who brought a fortune and could prove to be in fact Portuguese could enter in Portugal.

This time, however, the Director-General of the Portuguese MFA, Eduardo Vieira Leitão, did not share that demand of the PVDE, so he stated, on 11 March 1944, that when it was “impossible to determine immediately” who had and did not have Portuguese nationality, the MFA had decided to authorise entry into Portugal, on the express condition to abandon national territory should it be clearly proved that some were not in fact Portuguese<sup>32</sup>. Around 137 Sephardic Jews of Portuguese descent,

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<sup>27</sup> DHAMFA, Telegrams Sent to the Portuguese Legation in Berlin 1943

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., Telegrams Sent to the Portuguese Legation in Berlin 25/5/1943 and 14/6/1943

<sup>30</sup> Mário Matos Lemos, “Caeiro da Mata em Vichy”, *CLIO, Revista do Centro de História da Universidade de Lisboa*, Volume 18/19 (2008/2009); 342-344

<sup>31</sup> Haim Avni, “L’Espagne, le Portugal et les Juifs sépharades au xx siècle. Propositions pour une étude comparée”, 327-330

<sup>32</sup> DHAMFA Letter to the PVDE from the MFA, of April 1944. António Melo, “Os sobreviventes de Bergen Belsen”, *Estrelas da Memória*, dir. Esther Mucznik (Lisbon: Edition Reborn, 2005), 201-203



residing in France, thus ended up arriving in Portugal in three groups: the first, as it we have seen, of 40 persons on 2 September; the second, of 43 individuals, on 16 October; and the third, of 54 additional Jews, on 1 November 1943. Finally, on 27 June 1944, the eve of that country's liberation, the last group left France, consisting of 47 persons and thus raising to 184 the number of Jews with Portuguese passports who left that country<sup>33</sup>

### **Jews from Greece and Salonika**

The fate of Jews in Greece was different, depending on whether the regions where they were located were occupied by Bulgarians, Italians or Germans. However, when Italy surrendered to the Allies on 8 September 1943, the Germans would occupy the rest of Greece, carrying out the "Final Solution" on the Greek Jews. It was in Salonika that the largest Greek Jewish community resided, consisting of around 50,000 persons when the Germans occupied the city in 1942 and later, between March and August 1943, more than 40,000 Jews were deported to Auschwitz-Birkenau, where they were killed upon arrival.

In the telegram message of 27 March 1943 already referred to, sent by Salazar to Tovar de Lemos, the head of the Portuguese government said that he had learned, from the German Legation in Lisbon, that the foreign Jews could leave Greece up until 15 June<sup>34</sup>. The minister of Portugal in Germany informed the MFA on 30 April that he had received information from the Israeli Community of Salonika that, according to them, there were only six Portuguese Jews there who sought repatriation and requested instructions on how to proceed<sup>35</sup>. Later in an official telegram message dated 23 December 1943, sent to its Legation in Berlin, the Portuguese MFA stated that it authorised repatriation, but that "by virtue of known concerns" over the "basis of nationality claimed by many Israelis", it had requested from German authorities "Jewish documents to be examined there"<sup>36</sup>.

After prolonged and time-consuming negotiations, the German minister of Foreign Affairs sent the Portuguese Legation in Berlin, on 5 May 1944, a list with the names of 19 Portuguese Jews (an initial group of 16 and another 3). Incarcerated by the Germans in Athens, these had been transferred to the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp<sup>37</sup>. The train on which they were transported arrived at that concentration camp on 11 August 1943, where they were placed in one of the sub camps, reserved for those from "neutral" countries (*Neutralenlager*), before being repatriated to Portugal after ten months<sup>38</sup>.

That was the time that it took Salazar and his government to decide the fate of those Jews. And yet, it was known that the delay or refusal of repatriation by the two neutral Iberian countries would mean that their final destination would be Auschwitz.

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<sup>33</sup> Avraham Milgram, *Portugal, Salazar e os Judeus* (Lisbon: Gradiva, 2010), 292

<sup>34</sup> PRO-HW 12-296 21 March/43 115886, 6/4/1943 and 7/4/1943

<sup>35</sup> DHAMFA. Telegram received by the Portuguese Legation in Berlin, 30/4/1943; German Legation in Lisbon - Aide-mémoire, December 1943

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., Telegrams Sent 1943

<sup>37</sup> *Judeus em Portugal. O Testemunho de 50 Homens e Mulheres*, ed. José Freire Antunes (Versailles: Edeline, 2002), 107-111

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 583-586

On 11 July 1944, the Berlin Legation communicated that the 19 Jews would be sent to the French-Spanish border on a train transporting British citizens in exchange for Germans in Lisbon<sup>39</sup> and soon after that, they arrived in Portugal<sup>40</sup>. However, on 28 July, the Portugal Legation in Berlin sent Salazar another list of 13 Jews, coming from Greece (born in Salonika and Kavalla), whose repatriation had also been requested the previous month.

For reasons of space, and because it is a different case, we will not cover in depth here the situation of Portuguese passports of protection provided in Hungary to endangered Jews, similarly to what representatives of other neutral countries and the Vatican did in Budapest. Let it be said that Portugal<sup>41</sup>. In any case, the number of persons protected in Hungary by Portuguese diplomats was around a thousand and about 800 received a protective passport.

## Epilogue

The geographic situation and circumstances provided by Portuguese neutrality, the fact the New State, despite similarities that it had with the German national socialist regime, differentiated itself in significant ways – specifically by staying away from Nazi biological racism and anti-Semitism – eventually led to Portugal being a country that received refugees. But the regime merely tolerated their presence as long as the country was a transitory shelter and closed its borders. From the beginning of the war, it became extremely difficult to enter the country and starting in December 1940, only the PVDE awarded visas.

To determine exactly how many refugees passed through Portugal during World War II is difficult, due to the lack of sources. Regarding the general numbers for the entire war period, there are many discrepancies in what is provided by various accessible sources, with an obvious tendency, on the part of Jewish aid organisations, to exaggerate the number. For example, the American Jewish Joint Committee accounted for 100,000 who passed through Portugal between June of 1940 and the beginning of 1944. Later, starting in 1942, when the Holocaust was in full force, the number of refugees in Portugal decreased. On average, 24,000 people entered during that year. For the year of 1943 there are no numbers and in the beginning of 1944 there would only be 800 “genuine” refugees in Portugal, according to the Joint. In summary, although it is difficult to make precise estimates, due also to the existence of illegal immigrants, we lean towards the number of 60,000 to 80,000 refugees, also due to the numbers that the historiography shows for Spain.

But we see that, just as with the governments of the allied and other neutral countries, the Portuguese government was gradually but surely learning about what was happening in Poland and the USSR. The Portuguese government directly obtained very

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<sup>39</sup> PRO-HW 12-296, 132763 20/6/1944, 133005, 27/6/1944 from the Chargé d’Affaires in Berlin to the Lisbon MFA, 20/6/1944; Jews from Greece Portuguese report 133217 2/7/1944, 133785 18/7/44; from the Chargé d’Affaires in Berlin to the Lisbon MFA 28/6/1944 133781 18/7/44

<sup>40</sup> Nair Alexandra, “Judeus ibéricos no Levante: Salónica”, *Estrelas da Memória*, 218-227.

<sup>41</sup> Manuela Franco, «Os Judeus em Portugal», *Dicionário de História de Portugal*, coord. António Barreto and Maria Filomena Mónica, Supplement, vol. 8 (Porto: Livraria Figueirinhas, 1999), 314-324.

important information from members of the mission of Portuguese officials sent to Germany in December 1941, of the massacres of Einsatzgruppen in the invaded Soviet Union, which reported on the violence committed against Jews in the Baltic countries. As for Poland, beginning in mid-1942, news also kept coming from the Polish government in exile in London, containing detailed information of the Jewish massacres. Starting at the end of the year, specifically with the Declaration of Allied Governments, there was no longer any excuse, even for Portuguese Germanophiles, to pretend to not know what was going on there.

However, in regard to the matter of the “repatriation” of Jews of Portuguese descent in 1943 and 1944, Portugal fell very short of what it could have done, only saving a tiny part of those who were threatened to be killed by the Nazis, and knowing that was their fate. In Portugal, the “repatriation” of the group of Portuguese Jews from German territory was dependent on a rigorous proof of their nationality. In light of the magnitude of the crime perpetrated by German Nazis and by their accomplices, the Portuguese government’s position – during a war in which it remained neutral – fell tremendously short of what would be desired.

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